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BOSTON.

BY HENRY JAMES.

IT sometimes uncomfortably happens for a writer, consulting his remembrance, that he remembers too much and finds himself knowing his subject too well, which is but the case of the bottle too full for the wine to start. There has to be room for the air to circulate between one's impressions, between the parts of one's knowledge, since it is the air, or call it the intervals on the sea of one's ignorance, of one's indifference, that sets these floating fragments into motion. This is more or less what I feel in presence of the invitation—even the invitation written on the very face of the place itself, of its actual aspects and appearances—to note one's "impression" of Boston. Can one *have*, in the conditions, an impression of Boston, any that has not been for long years as inappreciable as a "sunk" picture?—that dead state of surface which requires a fresh application of varnish. The situation I speak of is the consciousness of "old" knowledge, knowledge so compacted by the years as to be unable, like the bottled wine, to flow. The answer to such questions as these, no doubt, however, is the practical one of trying a shake of the bottle or a brushful of the varnish. My "sunk" sense of Boston found itself vigorously varnished by mere renewal of vision at the end of long years; though I confess that under this favoring influence I ask myself why I should have had, after all, the notion of overlaid deposits of experience. The experience had anciently been small—so far as smallness may be imputed to any of our prime initiations; yet it had left consequences out of proportion to its limited seeming self. Early contacts had been brief and few, and the slight bridge had long ago collapsed; wherefore the impressed condition that acquired again, on the spot, an intensity, struck me as but half explained by the inordinate power

of assimilation of the imaginative young. I should have had, none the less, to content myself with this evidence of the magic of past sensibilities, had not the question suddenly been lighted for me as by a sudden flicker of the torch—and for my special benefit—carried in the hand of history. This light, waving for an instant over the scene, gave me the measure of my relation to it both as to immense little extent and to quite subjective character.

I.

It was in strictness only a matter of noting the harshness of change—since I scarce know what else to call it—on the part of the approaches to a particular spot I had wished to revisit. I made out, after a little, the entrance to Ashburton Place; but I missed, on that spacious summit of Beacon Hill, more than I can say, the pleasant little complexity of the other time marked with its share of the famous Old-World “crookedness” of Boston, that element of the mildly tortuous which did duty, for the story-seeker, as an ancient and romantic note and was half envied, half derided, by the merely rectangular criticism. Didn’t one remember the day when New-Yorkers, when Philadelphians, when pilgrims from the West, sated with their eternal equidistances, with the quadrilateral scheme of life, “raved” about Cornhill, and appeared to find in the rear of the State House a recall of one of the topographical, the architectural jumbles of Europe or Asia? And did not, indeed, the small happy accidents of the disappearing Boston exhale in a comparatively sensible manner the warm breath of history, the history of something as against the history of nothing?—so that, being gone, or generally going, they enabled one at last to feel, and almost to talk, about them as one had found one’s self feeling and talking about the sacrificed relics of Old Paris and Old London. In this immediate neighborhood of the enlarged State House, where a great raw clearance has been made, memory met that pang of loss, knew itself sufficiently bereft to see the vanished objects, a scant but adequate cluster of “nooks,” of such odds and ends as parochial schemes of improvement sweep away, positively overgrown, within one’s own spirit, by a wealth of legend. There was at least the gain, at any rate, that one was now going to be free to picture them, to embroider them, at one’s ease—to tangle them up in retrospect and make the real romantic claim for them. This,

accordingly, is what I am doing; but I am doing it in particular for the sacrificed end of Ashburton Place, the Ashburton Place that I anciently knew. This eminently respectable by-way, on my return to question it, opened its short vista for me honestly enough, though looking rather exposed and undermined, since the mouth of the passage to the west, formerly measured and narrow, had begun to yawn into space—a space peopled, in fact, for the eye of appreciation, with the horrific glazed perpendiculars of the future. But the pair of ancient houses I was in quest of kept their tryst; a pleasant individual pair, mated with nothing else in the street, yet looking, at that hour, as if their old still faces had lengthened, their shuttered, lidded eyes had closed, their brick complexions had paled, above the good granite basements, to a fainter red—all as with the cold consciousness of a possible doom.

That possibility, on the spot, was not present to me, occupied as I was with reading into one of them a short page of history that I had my own reasons for finding of supreme interest, the history of two years of far-away youth spent there at a period—the closing-time of the War—full both of public and of intimate vibrations. The two years had been those of a young man's, a very young man's, earliest fond confidence in a "literary career," and the effort of actual attention was to recover on the spot some echo of ghostly footsteps—the sound as of taps on the window-pane heard in the dim dawn. The place itself was, meanwhile, at all events, a conscious memento, with old secrets to keep and old stories to witness for, a saturation of life as closed together and preserved in it as the scent lingering in a folded pocket-handkerchief. But when, a month later, I returned again (a justly rebuked mistake) to see if another whiff of the fragrance were not to be caught, I found but a gaping void, the brutal effacement, at a stroke, of every related object, of the whole precious past. Both the houses had been levelled and the space to the corner cleared; hammer and pick-axe had evidently begun to swing on the very morrow of my previous visit—which had, moreover, been precisely the imminent doom announced, without my understanding it, in the poor scared faces. I had been present, by the oddest hazard, at the very last moments of the victim in whom I was most interested; the act of obliteration had been breathlessly swift, and if I had often seen how fast history could be made I had doubtless never so felt that it could be unmade still faster.

It was as if the bottom had fallen out of one's own biography, and one plunged backward, into space, without meeting anything. That, however, seemed just to give me, as I have hinted, the whole figure of my connection with everything about, a connection that had been sharp, in spite of brevity, and then had broken short off. Thus it was the sense of the rupture, more than of anything else, that I was, and for a still much briefer time, to carry with me. It seemed to leave me with my early impression of the place on my hands, inapt, as might be, for use; so that I could only try, rather vainly, to fit it to present conditions, among which it tended to shrink and stray.

It was on two or three such loitering occasions, wondering and invoking pauses that had, a little vaguely and helplessly perhaps, the changed crest of Beacon Hill for their field—it was at certain of these moments of charged yet rather chilled contemplation that I felt my small cluster of early associations shrivel to a scarce discernible point. I recall a Sunday afternoon, in particular, when I hung about on the now vaster platform of the State House for a near view of the military monuments erected there, the statues of Generals Hooker and Devens, and for the charm at once and the pang of feeling the whole backward vista, with all its features, fall, from that eminence, into gray perspective. The top of Beacon Hill quite rakes, with a but slightly shifting range, the old more definite Boston; for there seemed no item, nor any number, of that remarkable sum that it wouldn't anciently have helped one to distinguish or divine. There all these things essentially were at the moment I speak of, but only again as something ghostly and dim, something overlaid and smothered by the mere modern thickness. I lingered half an hour, much of the new disposition of the elements here involved being duly impressive, and the old uplifted front of the State House, surely, in its spare and austere, its ruled and pencilled, kind, a thing of beauty, more delightful and harmonious even than I had remembered it; one of the inestimable values again, in the eye of the town, for taste and temperance, as the perfectly felicitous "Park Street" Church, hard by, was another. The irresistible spell, however, I think, was something sharper yet—the coercion, positively, of feeling one's case, the case of one's deeper discomfiture, completely made out. The day itself, toward the winter's end, was all benignant, like the immense ma-

jority of the days of the American year, and there went forward across the top of the hill a continuous passage of men and women, in couples and talkative companies, who struck me as laboring wage-earners, of the simpler sort, arrayed in their Sunday best and decently enjoying their leisure. They came up from over the Common, they passed or paused, exchanging remarks on the beauty of the scene, but presenting themselves to me as of more interest, for the moment, than anything it contained.

For no sound of English, in a single instance, escaped their lips; the greater number spoke a rude form of Italian, the others some outland dialect unknown to me—though I waited and waited to catch an echo of antique refrains. No note of any shade of American speech struck my ear, save in so far as the sounds in question represent to-day so much of the substance of that idiom. The types and faces bore them out; the people before me were gross aliens to a man, and they were in serene and triumphant possession. Nothing, as I say, could have been more effective for figuring the hitherward bars of a grating through which I might make out, far off in space, “my” small homogeneous Boston of the more interesting time. It was not, of course, that our gross little aliens were immediate “social” figures in the narrower sense of the term, or that any personal commerce of which there might be question could color itself, to its detriment, from their presence; but simply that they expressed, as everywhere and always, the great cost at which every place on my list had become braver and louder, and that they gave the measure of the distance by which the general movement was *away*—away, always and everywhere, from the old presumptions and conceivabilities. Boston, the bigger, braver, louder Boston, was “away,” and it was quite, at that hour, as if each figure in my procession were there on purpose to leave me no doubt of it. Therefore, had I the vision, as filling the sky, no longer of the great Puritan “whip,” the whip for the conscience and the nerves of the local legend, but that of a huge applied sponge, a sponge saturated with the foreign mixture and passed over almost everything I remembered and might still have recovered. The detail of this obliteration would take me too far, but I had even then (on a previous day as well as only half an hour before), caught at something that might stand for a vivid symbol of the general effect of it. To come up from School

Street into Beacon was to approach the Anthènæum—exquisite institution, to fond memory, joy of the aspiring prime; yet to approach the Athenæum only to find all disposition to enter it drop as dead as if from quick poison, what did *that* denote but the dreadful chill of change, and of the change, in especial, that was most completely dreadful? For had not this honored haunt of all the most civilized—library, gallery, temple of culture, the place that was to Boston at large as Boston at large was to the rest of New England—had it not with peculiar intensity had a “value,” the most charming of its kind, no doubt, in all the huge country, and had not this value now, evidently, been brought so low that one shrank in delicacy from putting it to the test? It was a case of the detestable “tall building” again, and of its instant destruction of quality in everything it overtowers. Put completely out of countenance by the mere masses of brute ugliness beside it, the temple of culture looked only rueful and snubbed, hopelessly down in the world; so that, far from being moved to hover or to penetrate, one’s instinct was to pass by on the other side, averting one’s head from an humiliation one could do nothing to make less. And this, indeed, though one would have liked to do something; the brute masses above the comparatively small refined façade (one saw how happy one had always thought it) having for the inner ear the voice of a pair of school-bullies who hustle and pummel some studious little boy. “‘Exquisite’ was what they called you, eh? We’ll teach you then, little sneak, to be exquisite! We allow none of that rot round here.” It was heart-breaking, this presentation of a Boston practically void of an Athenæum; though perhaps not without interest as showing how much one’s own sense of the small city of the earlier time had been dependent on that institution. I found it of no use, at any rate, to think, for a compensatory sign of the new order, of the present Public Library; the present Public Library, however remarkable in its pomp and circumstance, and of which I had at that hour received my severe impression, being neither exquisite nor on the way to become so—a difficult, an impassable way, no doubt, for public libraries. Nor did I cast about, in fact, very earnestly, for consolation—so much more was I held by the vision of the closed order which shaped itself, continually, in the light of the differing present; an order gaining an interest for this backward view precisely as one felt that all the parts and

tokens of it, while it lasted, had hung intimately together. Missing those parts and tokens, or as many of them as one could, became thus a constant slightly painful joy: it made them fall so into their place as items of the old character, or proofs, positively, as one might say, of the old distinction. It was impossible not to see Park Street itself, for instance—while I kept looking at the matter from my more “swagger” hilltop—as violently vulgarized; and it was incontestable that, whatever might be said, there had anciently not been, on the whole continent, taking everything together, an equal animated space more exempt from vulgarity. There had probably been comparable spaces—impressions, in New York, in Philadelphia, in Baltimore, almost as good; but only almost, by reason of their lacking (which was just the point) the indefinable perfection of Park Street.

It seems odd to have to borrow from the French the right word in this association—or would seem so, rather, had it been less often indicated that that people have better names than our’s even for the qualities we are apt to suppose ourselves more in possession of than they. Park Street, in any case, had been magnificently *honnête*—the very type and model, for a pleasant street-view, of the character. The aspects that might elsewhere have competed were *honnêtes* and weak, whereas Park Street was *honnête* and strong—strong as founded on *all* the moral, material, social solidities, instead of some of them only; which made again all the difference. Personal names, as notes of that large emanation, need scarcely be invoked—they might even have a weakening effect; the force of the statement was in its collective, cumulative look, as if each member of the row, from the church at the Tremont Street angle to the amplest, squarest, most purple presence at the Beacon Street corner (where it always had a little the air of a sturdy proprietor with back to the fire, legs apart and thumbs in the armholes of an expanse of high-colored plush waistcoat), was but a syllable in the word “Respectable” several times repeated. One had somehow never heard it uttered with so convincing an emphasis. But the shops, up and down, are making all this as if it had never been, pleasant “premises” as they have themselves acquired; and it was to strike me from city to city, I fear, that the American shop in general pleads but meagrely—whether on its outer face or by any more intimate art—for indulgence to its tendency to swarm, to bristle, to vo-

ciferate. The shop front, observed at random, produced on me from the first, and almost everywhere alike, a singular, a sinister impression, which left me uneasy till I had found a name for it; the sense of an economic law of which one had not for years known the unholy rigor, the vision of "protected" production and of commodities requiring certainly, in many cases, every advantage Protection would give them. They looked to me always, these exhibitions, consciously and defiantly protected—in-solently safe, able to be with impunity anything they would; and when once that lurid light had settled on them I could see them, I confess, in none other; so that the objects composing them fell, throughout, into a vicious and villainous category, quite as if audibly saying: "Oh come; don't look among us for what you won't, for what you sha'n't, find, the best quality attainable; but only for that quite other matter, the best value we allow you. You must take us or go without, and, if you feel your nose thus held to the grindstone by the hard fiscal hand, it's no more than you deserve for harboring treasonable thoughts."

So it was, therefore, that while the imagination and the memory strayed—strayed away to other fiscal climates, where the fruits of competition so engagingly ripen and flush—the streets affected one at moments as a prolonged show-case for every arrayed vessel of humiliation. The fact that several classes of the protected products appeared to consist of articles that one might really anywhere have preferred, did little, oddly enough, to diminish the sense of severe discipline awaiting the restored absentee on contact with these occasions of traffic. The discipline, indeed, is general, proceeding as it does from so many sources, but it earns its name, in particular, from the predicament of the ingenuous inquirer who asks himself if he can "really bear" the combination of such general manners and such general prices, of such general prices and such general manners. He has a helpless bewildered moment during which he wonders if he mightn't bear the prices a little better if he were a little better addressed, or bear the usual form of address a little better if the prices were in themselves, given the commodity offered, a little less humiliating to the purchaser. Neither of these elements of his dilemma strikes him as likely to abate—the general cost of the things to drop, or the general grimness of the person he deals with over the counter to soften; so that he reaches out again for balm

to where he has had to seek it under other wounds, falls back on the cultivation of patience and regret, on large international comparison. He is confronted too often, to his sense, with the question of what may be "borne"; but what does he see about him if not a vast social order in which the parties to certain relations are all the while marvellously, inscrutably, desperately "bearing" each other? He may wonder how, under the strain, social cohesion does not altogether give way; but that is another question. For he asks himself quite as much as anything else how the shop-man or the shop-lady can bear to be barked at in the manner he constantly hears used to them by customers—he recognizes that no agreeable form of intercourse *could* survive a day in such air; so that what is the only relation finding ground there but a necessary vicious circle of gross mutual endurance?

These reflections connect themselves, moreover, with that most general of his restless hauntings in the United States—not only with the lapse of all wonderment at the immense number of absentees unreturned and making their lives as they may in other countries, but with the preliminary American postulate or basis for any successful accommodation of life. This basis is that of active pecuniary gain and of active pecuniary gain only—that of one's making the conditions so triumphantly pay that the prices, the manners, the other inconveniences, take their place as a friction it is comparatively easy to salve, wounds directly treatable with the wash of gold. What prevails, what sets the tune, is the American scale of gain, more magnificent than any other, and the fact that the whole assumption, the whole theory of life, is that of the individual's participation in it, that of his being more or less punctually and more or less effectually "squared." To make so much money that you won't, that you don't "mind," don't mind anything—that is absolutely, I think, the main American formula. Thus your making no money—or so little that it passes there for none—and being thereby distinctly reduced to minding, amounts to your being reduced to the knowledge that America is no place for you. To mind as one minds, for instance, in Europe, under provocation or occasion offered, and yet to have to live under the effect of American pressure, is speedily to perceive that the knot can be untied but by a definite pull of one or the other string. The immense majority of people pull, luckily for the existing order, the string that consecrates their connection

with it; the minority (small, however, only in comparison) pull the string that loosens that connection. The existing order is meanwhile safe, inasmuch as the faculty of making money is in America the commonest of all and fairly runs the streets: so simple a matter does it appear there, among vast populations, to make betimes enough *not* to mind. Yet the withdrawal of the considerable group of the pecuniarily disqualified seems no less, for the present, an assured movement; there will always be scattered individuals condemned to mind on a scale beyond any scale of making. The relation of this modest body to the country of their birth, which asks so much, on the whole—so many surrenders and compromises and the possession, above all, of such a prodigious head for figures—before it begins, in its wonderful way, to give, or to “pay,” would appear to us supremely touching, I think, as a case of communion baffled and blighted, if we had time to work it out. It would bathe in something of a tragic light the vivid truth that the “great countries” are all, more and more, happy lands (so far as any can be called such) for any, for every, sort of person rather than the middle sort. The upper sort—in the scale of wealth, the only scale now—can to their hearts’ content build their own castles and move by their own motors; the lower sort, masters of gain in *their* degree, can profit, also to their hearts’ content, by the enormous extension of those material facilities which may be gregariously enjoyed; they are able to rush about, as never under the sun before, in promiscuous packs and hustled herds, while to the act of so rushing about all felicity and prosperity appear for them to have been comfortably reduced. The frustrated American, as I have hinted at him, scraping for *his* poor practical solution in the depleted silver-mine of history, is the American who “makes” too little for the castle and yet, “minds” too much for the hustled herd, who can neither achieve such detachment nor surrender to such society, and who most of all accordingly, in the native order, fails of a working basis. The salve, the pecuniary salve, in Europe, is sensibly less, but less on the other hand also the excoriation that makes it necessary, whether from above or below.

II.

Let me at all events say for the Park Street Church, while I may still, on my hilltop, keep more or less in line with it, that

this edifice persistently "holds the note," as yet, the note of the old felicity, and remains by so doing a precious public servant. Strange enough, doubtless, to find one's self pleading sanctity for a theological structure sanctified only by such a name—as who should say the Park Street Hotel or the Park Street Post-office; so much clearer would the claim seem to come were it the case of another St. Clement Danes, or of another St. Mary-le-Strand. But in America we get our sanctity as we can, and we plead it, if we are wise, wherever the conditions suffer the faintest show of color for it to flush through. Again and again it is a question, on behalf of the memorial object (and especially when preservation is at stake), of an interest and an appeal proceeding exactly from the conditions, and thereby not of an absolute, but of a relative force and weight; which is exactly the state of the matter with the Park Street Church. This happy landmark is, in strictness, with its mild recall, by its spire, of Wren's bold London examples, the comparatively thin echo of a far-away song—playing its part, however, for harmonious effect, as perfectly as possible. It is admirably placed, quite peculiarly *present*, in the Boston scene, and thus, for one reason and another, it points its moral as not even the State House does. So we see afresh, under its admonition, that charm is a flower of wild and wind-blown seed—often not to be counted on when most anxiously planted, but taking its own time and its own place both for enriching and for mocking us. It mocks assuredly, above all, our money and our impatience, elements addressed to buying or "ordering" it, and only asks that when it does come we shall know it and love it. When we fail of this intelligence, it simply, for its vengeance, boycotts us—makes us as vulgar folk who have no concern with it. Then if we ever miss it we can never get it back—though our deepest depth of punishment, of course, is to go on fatuously not missing it, the joy of ourselves and of each other and the derision of those who know. These reflections were virtually suggested to me, on the eve of my leaving Boston, by ten words addressed to my dismay; the effect of which was to make Park Street Church, for the hour, the most interesting mass of brick and mortar and (if I may risk the supposition) timber in America.

The words had been spoken, in the bright July air, by a friend encountered in the very presence of the mild monument, on the

freshly perceived value of which, for its position, for its civil function, I had happened irrepressibly to exclaim. Thus I learned that its existence might be spoken of as gravely menaced—menaced by a scheme for the erection of a “business block,” a huge square of innumerable tiers and floors, thousands of places of trade, the trade that in such a position couldn’t fail to be roaring. In the eye of financial envy the church was but a cumberer of the ground, and where, about us, had we seen financial envy fail when it had once really applied the push of its fat shoulder? Drunk as it was with power, what was to be thought of as resisting it? This was a question, truly, to frighten answers away—until I presently felt the most pertinent of all return as if on tiptoe. The perfect force of the case *as a case*, as an example, *that* was the answer of answers; the quite ideal pitch of the opportunity for virtue. Ideal opportunities are rare, and this occasion for not sacrificing the high ornament and cynosure of the town to the impudence of private greed just happens to be one, and to have the finest marks of character. One had but to imagine a civilized community reading these marks, feeling that character, and then consciously and cynically falling below its admirable chance, to take in the impossibility of any such blot on the page of honor, any such keen appetite for the base alternative. It would be verily the end—the end of the old distinguished life, of the common intelligence that had flowered formerly, for attesting fame, from so strong a sap and into so thick and rich a cluster. One had thought of these things as one came and went—so interesting to-day in Boston are such informal consultations of the oracle (that of the very air and “tone”), such puttings to it of the question of what the old New England spirit may have still, intellectually, æsthetically, or for that matter even morally, to give; of what may yet remain, for productive scraping, of the formula of the native Puritanism educated, the formula once capacious enough for the “literary constellation” of the Age of Emerson. Is that cornucopia empty, or does some handful of strong, or at least sound, fruit lurk to this day, a trifle congested by keeping, up in the point of the horn? What, if so, are, in the ambient air, the symptoms of this impossibility? What, are the signs of intellectual promise, poetic, prosaic, philosophic, in the current generations, those actually learning their principal lesson, as one assumes, from the great University

hard by? The old formula, that of Puritanism educated, has it, in fine, except for "business," anything more to communicate? Or do we perhaps mistake the case in still speaking, by reason of the projected shadow of Harvard, of "education" as at all involved?

Oh, for business, for a commercial, an organizing energy of the first order, the indications would seem to abound, the air being full of them, as of one loud voice, and nowhere so full perhaps as at that Park Street corner, precisely, where it was to be suggested to me that their meaning was capable, on occasion, of turning to the sinister. Commercial energy, at least, was educated, up to the eyes—Harvard was still caring for that more than for anything else—but the wonderments, or perhaps rather the positive impressions, I have glanced at bore me constant company, keeping the last word, all emphasis of answer, back as if for the creation of a dramatic suspense. I liked the suspense, none the less, for what it had in common with "intellectual curiosity," and it gave me a light, moreover, which was highly convenient, helping me to look at everything in some related state to this proposition of the value of the Puritan residuum—the question of whether value is expressed, for instance, by the little tales, mostly by ladies, and about and for children romping through the ruins of the Language, in the monthly magazines. Some of my perceptions of relation might seem forced, for other minds, but it sufficed me that they were straight and clear for myself—straight and clear again, for example, when (always on my hilltop and raking the prospect over for memories) I quite assented to the tacit intimation that a long æsthetic period had closed with the disappearance of the old Museum Theatre. This had been the theatre of the "great" period—so far as such a description may fit an establishment that never produced during that term a play either by a Bostonian or by any other American; or it had at least, with however unequal steps, kept the great period company, made the Boston of those years quite complacently participate in its genial continuity. This character of its *being* an institution, its really being a theatre, with a repertory and a family of congruous players, not one of them the baleful actor-manager, head and front of all the so rank and so acclaimed vulgarities of our own day—this nature in it of not being the mere empty shell, the indifferent cave of the winds, that yields

a few nights' lodging, under stress, to the passing caravan, gave it a dignity of which I seemed to see the ancient city gratefully conscious, fond and jealous, and the thought of which invites me to fling over it now perhaps too free a fold of the mantle of romance. And yet why too free? is what I ask myself as I remember that the Museum had for long years a repertory—the repertory of its age—a company and a cohesion, theatrical trifles of the cultivation of which no present temple of the drama from end to end of the country appears to show a symptom. Therefore I spare a sigh to its memory, and, though I doubtless scarce think of it as the haunt of Emerson, of Hawthorne, or of Mr. Ticknor, the common conscience of the mid-century in the New England capital insists on showing, at this distance of time, as the richer for it.

That, then, was one of the missed elements, but the consequent melancholy, I ought promptly to add, formed the most appropriate soil for stray sprouts of tenderness in respect to the few aspects that had not suffered. The old charm of Mount Vernon Street, for instance, wandering up the hill, almost from the water-side, to the rear of the State House, and fairly hanging about there to rest like some good flushed lady, of more than middle age, a little spent and “blown”—this ancient grace was not only still to be felt, but was charged, for depth of interest, with intenser ghostly presences, the rich growth of time, which might have made the ample slope, as one mounted, appear as beatifically peopled as Jacob's Ladder. That was exactly the kind of impression to be desired and welcomed; since ghosts belong only to places and suffer and perish with them. It was as if they themselves, moreover, were taking pleasure in this place, fairly indeed commending to me the fine old style of the picture. Nothing less appeared to account for my not having, in the other age, done it, as the phrase is, full justice, recognized in it so excellent a peace, such a clear Boston bravery—all to the end that it should quite strike me, on the whole, as not only, for the minor stretch and the domestic note, the happiest street-scene the country could show, but as pleasant, on those respectable lines, in a degree not surpassed even among outland pomps. Oh, the wide benignity of brick, the goodly, friendly, ruddy fronts, the felicity of scale, the solid *seat* of everything, even to the handful of happy deviations from the regular, produced, we may fancy, by one of those

"historic" causes which so rarely complicate, for humanization, the blankness of the American street-page, and the occasional occurrence of which in general, as I am perhaps too repeatedly noting, excites on the part of the starved story-seeker a fantastic insistence! I find myself willing, after all, to let my whole estimate of these mere mild monuments of private worth pass for extravagant, if it but leave me a perch for musing on the oddity of our nature which makes us still like the places we have known or loved to grow old, when we can scarcely bear it in the people. To walk down Mount Vernon Street to Charles was to have a brush with that truth, to recognize at least that we like the sense of age to come, locally, when it comes with the right accompaniments, with the preservation of character and the continuity of tradition, merits I had been admiring on the brow of the eminence. From the other vision, the sight of the "decline in the social scale," the lapse into shabbiness and into bad company, we only suffer, for the ghosts in that case either refused to linger, or linger at the most with faces ashamed, and as if appealing against their association.

Such was the condition of the Charles Street ghosts, it seemed to me—shades of a past that had once been so thick and warm and happy; they moved, dimly, through a turbid medium in which the signs of their old life looked soiled and sordid. Each of them was there, indeed, from far, far back; they met me on the pavement, yet it was as if we could pass but in conscious silence, and nothing could have helped us, for any courage of communion, if we had not enjoyed the one merciful refuge that remained, where indeed we could breathe again, and with intensity, our own liberal air. Here, behind the effaced anonymous door, was the little ark of the modern deluge, here still the long drawing-room that looks over the water and toward the sunset, with a seat for every visiting shade, from far-away Thackeray down, and relics and tokens so thick on its walls as to make it positively, in all the town, the votive temple to memory. Ah, if it hadn't been for *that* small patch of common ground, with its kept echo of the very accent of the past, the revisiting spirit, at the bottom of the hill, could but have muffled his head, or but have stifled his heart, and turned away forever. Let me even say that—always now at the bottom of the hill—it was in this practical guise he afterwards, at the best, found himself roaming. It is from about that

point southward that the new splendors of Boston spread, and will clearly continue to spread; but it opened out to me as a tract pompous and prosaic, with which the little interesting city, the city of character and genius, exempt as yet from the Irish yoke, had absolutely nothing to do. The disconnection was complete, and the southward, the westward, territory, made up, at the most, a platform or stage from which the other, the concentrated Boston of history, the Boston of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Ticknor, Motley, Prescott, Parkman and the rest (in the sense either of birthplace or of central or sacred city) could be seen in as definite and, indeed now in almost as picturesquely mediæval, a concretion, appear to make as black and minute and "composed" a little pyramidal image, as the finished background of a Dürer print. It seemed to place itself there in the middle distance, on the sharp salience of its comingled Reforms and Reserves—reformers and reservists rubbing shoulders in the common distinctness of their detachment from an inexpressive generation, and the composition rounding itself about as with the very last of its loose ends snipped off or tucked in.

III.

There are neither loose ends nor stray flutters, whether of the old prose or the old poetry, to be encountered on the large lower level, though there are performances of a different order, in the shadow of which such matters tend to look merely and perhaps rather meagrely subjective. It is all very rich and prosperous and monotonous, the large lower level, but oh, so inexpressibly vacant! Where the "new land" corresponds most to its name, rejoices most visibly and complacently in its newness, its dumped and shovelled foundations the home till recently of a mere vague marine backwater, there the long, straight residential avenues, vistas quite documentary, as one finds one's self pronouncing them, testify with a perfection all their own to a whole vast side of American life. The winter winds and snows, and the eternal dust, run races in them over the clearest course anywhere provided for that grim competition; the league-long brick pavements mirror the expensive void, for many months of the year, in their smooth tight ice-coats (and ice over brick can only be described as heels over head), and the innumerable windows, up and down, watch each other, all hopelessly, as for revelations,

indiscretions, audible, resonant, rebellious or explosive break-ages of the pane from within, that never disturb the peace. (No one will begin, and the buried hatchet, in spite of whatever wistful looks to where it lies, is never dug up.) So it is that these sustained affirmations of one of the smoothest and the most settled social states "going," excite perversely, on the part of the restless analyst, questions that would seem logically the very least involved. We call such aspects "documentary" because they strike us, more than any others, as speaking volumes for the possible *serenity*, the common decency, the quiet cohesion, of a vast commercial and professional *bourgeoisie* left to itself. Here was such an order caught in the very fact, the fact of its living maximum. A *bourgeoisie* without an aristocracy to worry it is, of course, a very different thing from a *bourgeoisie* struggling in that shade, and nothing could express more than these interminable perspectives of security the condition of a community leading its life in the social sun.

Why, accordingly, of December afternoons, did the restless analyst, pausing at eastward-looking corners, find on his lips the vague refrain of Tennyson's "long, unlovely street"? Why, if Harley Street, if Wimpole, is unlovely, should Marlborough Street, Boston, be so—beyond the mere platitude of its motiveless name? Here is no monotony of black leasehold brick, no patent disavowal, in the interest of stale and strictly subordinate gentilities, of expression, animation, variety, curiosity; here, on the contrary, is often the individual housefront in all its independence and sometimes in all its felicity; this whole region being, like so many such regions in the United States to-day, the home of the free hand, a field for the liveliest architectural experiment. There are interesting, admirable houses—though always too much of the detestable vitreous "bow"—and there is above all what there is everywhere in America for saving, or at least for propping up, the situation, that particular look of the clear course and large opportunity ahead, which, when taken in conjunction with all the will to live, all the money to spend, all the knowledge to acquire and apply, seems to marshal the material possibilities in glittering illimitable ranks. Beacon Street, moreover, used to stretch back like a workable telescope for the focussing, at its higher extremity, in an air of which the positive defect is to be too seldom prejudicial, of the gilded dome of the State

House fresh as a Christmas toy seen across the floor of a large salubrious nursery. This made a civic vignette that furnished a little the desert of cheerful family life. But Marlborough Street, for imperturbable reasons of its own, used, periodically, to break my heart. It was of no use to make a vow of hanging about till I should have sounded my mystery—learned to say *why* black, stale Harley Street, for instance, in featureless row after row, had character and depth, while what was before me fell upon my sense with the thinness of tone of a precocious child—and still more why this latter effect should have been, as it were, so insistently irritating. If there be strange ways of producing an interest, to the critical mind, there are doubtless still stranger ways of not producing one, and it was important to me, no doubt, to make “my” defunct and compact and expressive little Boston appear to don all the signs of that character that the New Land, and what is built thereon, miss. How could one consider the place at all unless in a light?—so that one had to decide definitely on one’s light.

This it was, after all, easy to do from the moment one had determined to concede to the New Land the fact of possession of everything convenient and handsome under heaven. Peace could always come with this recognition of all the accessories and equipments, a hundred costly things, parks and palaces and institutions, that the earlier community had lacked; and there was an individual connection—only one, presently to be noted—in which the actual city might seem for an hour to have no capacity for the uplifting *idea*, no aptitude for the finer curiosity, to envy the past. But, meanwhile, it was strange that even so fine a conception, finely embodied, as the new Public Library, magnificently superseding all others, was committed to speak to one’s inner perception still more of the power of the purse, and of the higher turn for business than of the old intellectual, or even of the old moral, sensibility. Why else, then, should one have thought of some single, some admirable, hour of Emerson, in one of the dusky, primitive lecture-halls that have ceased to be, or of some large insuperable antislavery eloquence of Wendell Phillips’s, during the same term and especially during the War, as breathing more of the consciousness of literature and of history than all the promiscuous bustle of the Florentine palace by Copley Square? Not that this latter edifice, the fruit of immense considerations,

has not its honorable interest too; which it would have if only in the light of the constant truth that almost any American application or practice of a general thought puts on a new and original aspect. Public libraries are a thoroughly general thought, and one has seen plenty of them, one is seeing dreadfully many, in these very days, the world over; yet to be confronted with an American example is to have sight straightway of more difference than community, and to glean on the spot fresh evidence of that democratic way of dealing which it has been the American office to translate from an academic phrase into a bristling fact. The notes of difference of the Florentine palace by Copley Square—more delicately elegant, in truth, if less sublimely rugged, than most Florentine palaces—resolve themselves, like so many such notes everywhere, into our impression here, once more, that every one is “in” everything, whereas in Europe so comparatively few persons are in anything (even as yet in society, more and more the common refuge or retreat of the masses).

The Boston institution, then, is a great and complete institution, with this reserve of its striking the restored absentee as practically without *penetralia*. A library without *penetralia* may affect him but as a temple without altars; it will, at any rate, exemplify the distinction between a benefit given and a benefit taken, a borrowed, a lent, and an owned, an appropriated, convenience. The British Museum, the Louvre, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the treasures of South Kensington, are assuredly, under forms, at the disposal of the people; but it is to be observed, I think, that the people walk there more or less under the shadow of the right waited for and conceded. It remains as difficult as it is always interesting, however, to trace the detail (much of it obvious enough, but much more indefinable) of the personal port of a democracy that, unlike the English, is social as well as political. One of these denotements is that social democracies are unfriendly to the preservation of *penetralia*; so that when *penetralia* are of the essence, as in a place of study and meditation, they inevitably go to the wall. The main staircase in Boston, has, with its amplitude of wing and its splendor of tawny marble, a high and luxurious beauty—bribing the restored absentee to emotion, moreover, by expanding, monumentally, at one of its rests, into admirable commemoration of the Civil War service of the two great Massachusetts Volunteer regiments

of *élite*. Such visions, such felicities, such couchant lions and recorded names and stirred memories as these, encountered in the early autumn twilight, color an impression—even though to say so be the limit of breach of the silence in which, for persons of the generation of the author of these pages, appreciation of them can best take refuge: the refuge to which I felt myself anon reduced, for instance, opposite the State House, in presence of Saint-Gaudens's noble and exquisite monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts. There are works of memorial art that may suddenly place themselves, by their operation in a given case, outside articulate criticism—which was what happened, I found, in respect to the main feature, the rich staircase of the Library. Another way in which the bribe, as I have called it, of that masterpiece worked on the spot was by prompting one to immediate charmed perception of the character of the deep court and inner arcade of the palace, where a wealth of science and taste has gone to producing a sense, when the afternoon light sadly slants, of one of the myriad gold-colored courts of the Vatican.

These are the refinements of the present Boston—keeping company as they can with the healthy animation, as it struck me, of the rest of the building; the multitudinous bustle, the coming and going, as in a railway-station, of persons with carpet-bags and other luggage, the simplicity of plan, the open doors and immediate accesses, admirable *for* a railway-station, the ubiquitous children, *most* irrepressible little democrats of the democracy, the vain quest, above all, of the deeper depths aforesaid, some part that should be sufficiently *within* some other part, sufficiently withdrawn and consecrated, not to constitute a thoroughfare. Perhaps I didn't adequately explore; but there was always the visible scale and scheme of the building. It was a shock to find the so brave decorative designs of Puvis de Chavannes, of Sargent and Abbey and John Elliott, hanging over mere chambers of familiarity and resonance; and then, I must quickly add, it was a shock still greater perhaps to find one had no good reason for defending them against such freedoms. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander: had one not in other words, in the public places and under the great loggias of Italy, acclaimed it as just the charm and dignity of these resorts that, in their pictured and embroidered state, they still serve for the graceful

common life? It was true that one had not been imprisoned in that consistency in the Laurentian, in the Ambrosian Library—and at any rate one was here on the edge of abysses. Was it not splendid, for example, to see, in Boston, such large provision made for the amusement of children on rainy afternoons?—so many little heads bent over their story-books that the edifice took on at moments the appearance worn, one was to observe later on, by most other American edifices of the same character, that of a lively distributing-house of the new fiction for the young. The note was bewildering—yet, would one, snatching the bread-and-molasses from their lips, cruelly deprive the young of rights in which they have been installed with a majesty nowhere else approaching that of their American installation? I am not wrong, probably, at all events, in qualifying such a question as that as abysmal, and I remember how, more than once, I took refuge from it in craven flight, straight across the Square, to the already so interesting, the so rapidly expanding, Art Museum.

There, for some reason, questions exquisitely dropped; perhaps only for the reason that things sifted and selected have, very visibly, the effect of challenging the confidence even of the rash. It is of the nature of objects doomed to show distinction to make more or less of a desert round them, and peace reigned unbroken, I usually found, in the two or three Museum rooms that harbor a small but deeply interesting and steadily growing collection of fragments of the antique. Here the restless analyst found work to his hand—only too much; and indeed in presence of the gem of the series, of the perhaps just too conscious grace of a certain little wasted and dim-eyed head of Aphrodite, he felt that his function should simply give way, in common decency, to that of the sonneteer. For it is an impression by itself, and I think quite worth the Atlantic voyage, to catch in the American light the very fact of the genius of Greece. There are things we don't know, feelings not to be foretold, till we have had that experience—which I commend to the *raffiné* of almost any other clime. I should say to him that he has not *seen* a fine Greek thing till he has seen it in America. It is, of course, on the face of it, the *most* merciless case of transplanting—the mere moral of which, none the less, for application, becomes by no means flagrant. The little Aphrodite, with her connections, her antecedents and references exhibiting the maximum of breakage, is

no doubt as *lonely* a jewel as ever strayed out of its setting; yet, what does one quickly recognize but that the intrinsic lustre will have, so far as that may be possible, doubled. She has lost her background, the divine creature—has lost her company, and is keeping, in a manner, the strangest; but so far from having lost an iota of her power, she has gained unspeakably more, since what she essentially stands for she here stands for alone, rising ineffably to the occasion. She has in short, by her single presence, as yet, annexed an empire, and there are strange glimmers of moments when, as I have spoken of her consciousness, the very knowledge of this seems to lurk in the depth of her beauty. Where was she ever more, where was she ever so much, a goddess—and who knows but that, being thus divine, she foresees the time when, as she has “moved over,” the place of her actual whereabouts will have become one of her shrines? Objects doomed to distinction make round them a desert, I have said; but that is only for any gross confidence in other matters. For confidence in *them* they make a garden, and that is why I felt this quarter of the Boston Art Museum bloom, under the indescribable dim eyes, with delicate flowers. The impression swallowed up every other; the place, whatever it was, was supremely justified, and I was left cold by learning that a much bigger and grander and richer place is presently to overtop it.

The present establishment “dates back,” back almost to the good Boston of the middle years, and is full of all sorts of accumulated and concentrated pleasantness; which fact precisely gives the signal, by the terrible American law, for its coming to an end and giving a chance to the untried. It is a consistent application of the rotary system—the untried always awaiting its turn, and quite perceptibly stamping and snorting while it waits; all heedless as it is, poor innocent untried, of the certain hour of the impatiences before which it too will have to topple. It is not, indeed, that the American laws, so operating, have not almost always their own queer interest; founded as they are, all together, on one of the strongest of the native impulses. We see this characteristic again and again at play, see it in especial wherever we see (which is more than frequently enough), a University or a College “started” or amplified. This process almost always takes the form, primarily, of more lands and houses and halls and rooms, more swimming-baths and football-fields and

gymnasia, a greater luxury of brick and mortar, a greater ingenuity, the most artful conceivable, of accommodation and installation. Such is the magic, such the presences, that tend more than any other, to figure *as* the institution, thereby perverting not a little, as need scarce be remarked, the finer collegiate idea: the theory being, doubtless, and again most characteristically, that with all the wrought stone and oak and painted glass, the immense provision, the multiplied marbles and tiles and cloisters and acres, "people will come,"—that is, individuals of value will—and in some manner work some miracle. In the early American time, doubtless, individuals of value had to wait too much for things; but that is now made up by the way things are waiting for individuals of value. To which I must immediately add, however—and it is the ground of my allusion of a moment ago—that no impression of the "new" Boston can feel itself hang together without remembrance of what it owes to that rare exhibition of the living spirit lately achieved, in the interest of the fine arts, and of all that is noblest in them, by the unaided and quite heroic genius of a private citizen. To attempt to tell the story of the wonderfully gathered and splendidly lodged Gardner Collection would be to displace a little the line that separates private from public property; and yet to find no discreet word for it is to appear to fail of feeling for the complexity of conditions amid which so undaunted a devotion to a great idea (undaunted by the battle to fight, losing alas! with State Protection of native art, and with other scarce less uncanny things) has been able consummately to flower. It is in presence of the results magnificently attained, the energy triumphant over everything, that one feels the fine old disinterested tradition of Boston least broken.

HENRY JAMES.